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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the concept of the "one-stop shop" in relation to the provision of family services, whereby the family can access a range of support services made available in one location. The paper examines how the concept fits within the context of mainstream service provision in Great Britain today, specifically how the Coram Community Campus, as an example of a "one-stop shop" in London, attempts to meet diverse family needs in an inner city setting. Findings of the Campus model of multi-agency practice are presented to illustrate the impact of this approach on families and the quality of support provided. The paper describes the move in England away from crisis intervention toward more preventive work with vulnerable families, involving program coordination and partnerships. The Coram Community Campus model is described as an organization arrangement working to provide families and their young children in one of the most deprived areas in London with care, education, health, and social support. Distinguishing features of the Campus model are listed, and the services provided are summarized. The paper presents both qualitative and quantitative findings from the user survey and user interviews to examine how services were being used, to identify perspectives of the practitioners, and to provide concrete examples of "one-stop shopping." The paper concludes by asserting that the "one-stop shop" approach clearly responds to the complexity and diversity of family life in the inner city as it evolves to better meet multiple and diverse needs. Contains 21 references. (KB)

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'One-Stop Shopping' : Meeting Diverse Family Needs in the Inner City?

Paper presented to the 10th European Early Childhood Education Research Association Conference, London, UK, Aug 29 – Sept 1, 2000

Introduction

More and more in Britain jargon is creeping into our everyday language. Specific words or phrases might be used to depict a particular situation or state of affairs, and before long, as these words or phrases are picked up by policy makers, the media, the man in the street, or whoever, they become commonplace in our daily discourse. We adopt a rhetoric of words or phrases, implicitly understanding them, but often failing to pause and consider precisely what they mean.

When thinking about how I wanted to address the theme of this Conference, that is Complexity, Diversity and Multiple Perspectives in Early Childhood, in relation to the research on which I have been working, that is a study of the Coram Community Campus, a Multi Agency Childcare Network, I was immediately confronted by the problem of how to describe in a few words what the Campus is, what is special about it, what distinguishes it? In my endeavours to encapsulate the concept in a few simple words, the term 'one-stop shop' immediately came to mind. The description has been used by many of the practitioners working on the Campus, as well as by representatives of the statutory and voluntary agencies with which the Campus has been associated. In a recently published report, (DfEE, 2000) Early Excellence

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Centres in Britain are similarly described as 'offering 'one-stop shop' support within communities, linking education, health and social services'. But what exactly does 'one-stop shop' mean?

The forthcoming edition of the Penguin English dictionary apparently defines a string of new terms which have been absorbed into the English language in recent years, from 'e-commerce' to 'Blairism' and 'Thatcherism'. I wondered whether a similarly up-to-date dictionary might include the expression 'one-stop shop' and give me an authoritative definition. To my surprise, I found 'one-stop' listed in the Oxford English Dictionary (1998): 'One-stop' adj. (of a shop or other business) capable of supplying all a customer's needs within a particular range of goods or services. The Collins definition (2000) adds a further dimension – 'one-stop' adj. having or providing a range of related services or goods *in one place*, a 'one-stop shop' (my italics).

In this paper I would like to consider the concept of the 'one-stop shop' in relation to the provision of family services, whereby the customer, the family, can access a range of support services which are available in one location. I would like to examine how this concept fits within the context of mainstream service provision in Britain today, and in particular the way in which the Coram Community Campus, as an example of a 'one-stop shop', is attempting to meet diverse family needs in an inner city setting. I shall refer to some of the findings of our study of the Campus model of multi-agency practice to illustrate the impact this approach is having on the families it reaches and the quality of support it provides.

Our study, which was funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, is presently drawing to its conclusion at the end of two years. It was set up to examine the Campus during its early development. The specific aims of the research are:

- To contribute to the development of the model of service provision
- To describe and evaluate the development of the model
- To assess the replicability of the model
- To develop and apply methods of evaluating the service provision from the perspective of young children.

The research underpins current government policy on early childhood services, notably the early excellence centre initiative (Labour Party, 1996; DfEE, 1997) and the Sure Start programme (DfEE, 1999).

Background

The background to recent social policy in Britain in relation to early childhood services is no doubt all too familiar to most professionals working in the field in this country (see Pugh 1996, Jamieson and Owen 2000). Compared with virtually every other country in the European Union, we have a poor record in the UK as far as developing early childhood services and responding to the needs of families to be able to balance work and family responsibilities (Moss 1996). In their report for the Gulbenkian Foundation Enquiry (1996), Hodgkin and Newell referred to children's services here being 'narrowly conceived, compartmentalised and fragmented' , (p.38-39). They described some fourteen different government departments dealing with some aspect of children's interests, yet lacking any strategic planning which might

focus on children's interests per se. Moss and Petrie (1997) have referred similarly to what they term 'uni-functional services' focusing on 'one need, or providing one function in isolation, addressing one item on the agenda of one agency.'

The problem is that the needs of children and parents can seldom be divided into neat categories, such as health, education, leisure, employment, although in the past services have tended to be organised and offered as if they were (Pugh 1988, Ball 1994). More often, what is required is a combination of services from a number of agencies. Studies of early childhood services (Pugh and McQuail 1995) have endorsed the need for coordinated structures via multi-agency working to meet the needs of families and young children more effectively and to use resources more efficiently.

Alongside this dismal past record, a growing body of research has indicated the importance of children's early experiences, particularly during the first five years of life, for their future development and wellbeing. It is in these early years that a foundation is laid on which to build later learning (e.g. Bloom 1993; Dunn 1993; Sylva 1994). Studies further point to the long term benefits, in both human and financial terms, of preventive work with parents and young children (Schweinhardt Barnes & Weikart 1993). The results suggest that simple, relatively inexpensive measures, put into effect early, can save the need for more complex and costly interventions later. Wherever possible, it is thought that support is best provided within open-access, mainstream services - nurseries, health centres, etc., - in the local community, rather than through specialist referral services (e.g. Statham 1995; Smith and Pugh; Sinclair, Hearn & Pugh, 1997). We have, therefore, seen in this country a

move away from crisis intervention toward a more preventive approach to work with vulnerable families, once again looking to cross professional boundaries and work in partnerships in order to address the holistic needs of children and families. -

What has been termed the 'co-ordination debate' has gained momentum in the last twenty years, but it is only in recent years that government here has begun at last to accord greater priority to services for the youngest children, by allocating more resources and introducing new measures to encourage co-ordination between departments within a national framework for the development of services. Thus, we are witnessing a growing impetus to integrate, to co-ordinate, to promote what has been termed 'joined up' thinking in a 'quest for convergence and inclusion' (Jamieson and Owen 2000). We have seen a plethora of high profile initiatives - the National Childcare Strategy, the Early Excellence Centres, the Sure Start Programme, Health Action Zones. The notion of the 'one-stop shop' as an approach to service provision takes the co-ordination debate one step further, by locating the providers in one place, placing the emphasis on open-access mainstream integrated provision to meet the diverse needs of children and families

The Coram Community Campus as a 'One-Stop Shop'

Turning now to the Campus, I would like to consider how it fits into this background, and the ways in which it functions as a 'one-stop shop' for service provision. The Campus has been described as 'A group of voluntary and statutory organisations working together to provide a 'one-stop shop' for local families in the Kings Cross area of Camden' (Pugh, 1999) .

The 'Campus' concept

The term 'Campus' generally denotes a spatial arrangement, whereby a number of buildings share a common site, often linked to an educational input. But over and above this, at the Coram Community Campus, it is an organisational arrangement, a partnership in which all of the parts are linked together, working to a common purpose, that is serving the families and their young children in the local community. It offers a range of care, education, health and social support related to individual needs. The Campus thus fits with the dictionary definition of a 'one-stop shop'; it is a place capable of supplying all of a family's needs within a related range of services .

Location

The Campus is located on a three acre site in the King's Cross Ward of the Borough of Camden. Using the Jarman indices of deprivation, it is the most deprived ward in the borough, and one of the most deprived in London. The last census data showed that 35% of its population were from ethnic minorities, particularly Bangladesh, and 23% were unemployed. Only 16% were owner occupiers, compared with a national figure of 68%. In addition, there is a high level of homelessness and occupancy of bed and breakfast accommodation, and an increasing number of refugees and asylum seekers. Many of the families in the catchment area of the Campus face major economic and social challenges that may place them at high risk of breakdown. It is unquestionably an area of high need. At the same time, like many other parts of London, the area is also very mixed, with a significant number of middle class families, as well as a large student population. The needs of local families are therefore extremely diverse.

Distinguishing Features

What then is special about the Campus? What are its distinguishing features? It aims to incorporate the following features:

- An integrated, multi-agency provision, a network of services for children and families.
- A partnership of statutory and voluntary agencies with one agency, Coram Family, taking overall responsibility.
- Co-ordinated inter-agency and cross sectoral working between professionals and services.
- Mainstream open-access services for children and parents in the local community.
- Outreach work to hard to reach families who might not otherwise use services on the Campus, particularly refugee and homeless families, and those from the Bengali community.
- A combination of general and specialist provisions co-ordinated in such a way they are both comprehensive in terms of the range of services offered and inclusive in terms of access to those services.

At the start of our research, in 1998, when the Campus was just coming into existence, we asked service providers working there what they perceived to be its distinguishing features. At that stage, there was a consistency in their comments. They echoed closely the features I have just described, coloured by their anticipation of what the Campus was hoping to become. Two years later, when we asked the same question, opinions were more varied. For some the Campus was no more than a geographical entity, defined by its physical boundary, enclosing a collection of family

and children's services. Others laid more stress on the interconnectedness of its parts, describing it as a federation or network of organisations and individuals linked by a shared commitment to the wellbeing of young children and their families living in the community, a sort of 'pick and mix' for its users, as one person put it.

Located firmly within the wider co-ordination debate referred to above, there is nothing at the Campus which is inherently new. What is new is the combination of services and activities and the degree to which they in fact operate in practice as a network of closely integrated relationships on the site.

Service Providers

In our research, we have focused upon seven individual service providers which jointly make up the Coram Community Campus. Some of these were already located on the site before the Campus came into being. Others moved there specifically, attracted by the idea of being a part of the Campus concept. The services concerned may be summarised as follows:

- A 108 place local authority nursery offering education and daycare to children aged 6 months to 5 years, created by merging two former nurseries existing on the site, one a LA nursery, the other voluntary sector. The newly formed nursery was designated an Early Excellence Centre in 1999.
- A Parents' Centre newly created on the Campus, funded by a government grant (Single Regeneration Budget) and managed by Coram Family. It shares early excellence status with the LA nursery, as well as a single, joint governing body.

- A 20 place parent managed community nursery, offering education and daycare to children aged 2 - 5 years. This nursery already existed on the site.
- A special needs charity working with children with disabilities and their families. This service moved to the Campus from a previous location in North Camden.
- 2 voluntary sector projects working with homeless families - a family day centre, and an advice centre, both of which have been located on the site for some years.
- A small primary school for autistic children which came new to the Campus.

The Campus site also accommodates the headquarters of Coram Family, a national charity, together with a number of Coram's pre-existing projects. These projects constitute Coram Family's national agenda, as distinct from the community based focus of the Coram Community Campus projects . The former were not therefore included in the present research.

'Pick and Mix' in the 'One-Stop Shop'

Together, the community based service providers offer a huge range of activities across the Campus, some of which are located within specific projects, others overlap across projects. The concept of 'one-stop shopping' within the Campus structure operates therefore at two levels. On the one hand, it might mean that a family accesses services from a number of different projects. Alternatively, a family might engage in a number of different activities or services within one project, depending upon availability and need. To illustrate the range available in the 'pick and mix', the activities, both existing and planned for the future, can be grouped together as follows:

- There are provisions for children, which include nursery and daycare, an after school club and holiday club for primary children, and special support for children with special needs.
- There are provisions for parents and carers which include drop in, parent support in the task of bringing up children, and opportunities to access training and employment.
- There is a strong health dimension, with Campus services working in partnership with the health authority to promote child health and well woman. The Campus offers the services of a child psychologist and a social worker, with plans to extend this range of activities.
- Creative arts build on a long tradition on the site. They play an important part in much of the work already carried out and there are plans to include a community arts centre in the future development of the Campus.
- The Campus acts as an early years training base and has an active programme of training and research.

I would like to refer to our research findings in order to explore a little more deeply the concept of the 'one-stop shop' operating in practice at the Campus. I shall look first at the quantitative evidence from the user survey which we conducted to examine how Campus services were being used, and the extent to which there was overlap and movement between activities. Then I shall move to the qualitative data to consider the Campus from the perspective of the practitioners, the service providers, to see how they perceive the 'one-stop shop', the benefits and the risks posed. Finally, I shall draw briefly on the in depth interviews with the users, to highlight some concrete examples of 'one-stop shopping'.

The Extent of Multiple Use

Many of the Campus services had been in existence independently long before the Campus came into existence, and still operate autonomously to a degree. Although the Campus set out to be a 'one-stop shop', we did not therefore expect to find a very high level of multiple use among users, recognising that the need for a variety of support services might simply not exist. We anticipated that, for a significant number of families, the pattern of use might not have changed with the advent of the Campus if their needs were being met adequately by the service initially attended. On the other hand, the availability of a range of services on the site might in itself facilitate wider take up.

In our user survey, 18 out of a total of 137 respondents were using more than one service at the time they were interviewed. Two thirds of these (12) were users of the Parents' Centre and the large nursery which together share early excellence status. This shared status appeared to consolidate the links between these two projects and clearly promoted movement between them. A further 32 respondents had used another Campus service at an earlier point in time, and indeed two of these had used more than one such service. Thus, just over a third (35%) of those interviewed had experience of more than one Campus service provider. Several others stated that they had their children's names on the waiting lists for one of the Campus nurseries, and hence might become multiple users in the near future. Multiple use of services was however rare for users of the homelessness projects or for users of the projects for children with disabilities.

As stated above, 'one-stop shopping' can operate at two distinct levels, either between services, or within them. We therefore looked at the number of *activities* people were engaged in, as distinct from the number of *services* they were using. For example, a family could be using the drop-in, attending classes, and obtaining advice, all within one service. Using this measure, we found that just over a half – 51% - of our respondents had engaged in at least three activities since they had been coming to the Campus. Furthermore, whereas homeless families had rarely used other services on the Campus, within the homeless families' centre, 'one-stop shop' provision meant that 71.4% of the users had engaged in three or more different activities.

However, when we asked respondents if they preferred having activities all on one site or spread around the local community, opinions were almost equally divided, with the users of the large nursery being the most in favour of having everything on one site and the most likely to say that experiencing this on the Campus had made a real difference to them. Understandably, some respondents were in favour of a combination, given that the single location might not be convenient. Indeed, some of the service providers at the Campus do take activities out into the community, in an attempt to spread services more widely and to make them more accessible, a sort of 'takeaway' service.

'One-Stop' Service Provision

Service providers were quick to point out the convenience of the Campus for users, and the ease of referral which it enabled, giving 'access to services without hassle'. However, 'one-stop shopping' was not without its risks. Just as it can be hard to find specific goods sought in the supermarket, so too we were told of users finding it hard

to locate the right service among so many related ones at the Campus. We heard of a mother and child who spent an entire morning in the special needs service for families with children with disabilities before it was realised that they should have been at the Parents' Centre. Furthermore, when English is not the first language, seeking directions in these circumstances can prove to be difficult.

On the other hand, the proximity of all of the services at the Campus meant that staff could act as effective 'signposts' when they refer users to other projects and if necessary walk them round to show where they are located and introduce them. Parents too can support one another, providing an escort service when necessary. The most effective links clearly were between adjacent services – the Parents' Centre and the large nursery, and between the two homeless families' projects.

The latter are in some ways set apart from the other Campus projects. They work very closely together because they share clientele. Between them, they are able to offer a comprehensive service for their families, with everything from provision for laundry to complicated legal advice, with just a few steps walk separating the two projects. But their users are in some ways a special group with particular needs. Thus, while the homeless families' projects accept that in theory the Campus has made it easier to refer families on to other agencies, in practice, as we have shown above, they still tend to offer their own 'one-stop shop' facilities. Homeless families go through a process before they are at a stage where they are willing or able to take up some of the wider opportunities, because of the stigma which homelessness carries with it. When that stage comes, the projects endeavour to move families on to other activities, for example linking them in to the Parents' Centre for the play schemes or

classes, or to the nurseries. For their part, these other Campus services try very hard to accommodate homeless families and to make special provision for them.

The range of services on offer at the Campus is enriched by some of the specialist services, the idea being that by locating them within the community setting, they might be made more accessible. One of the outstanding successes has been the achievement of the child psychologist. Early on, this service commenced operation at the Campus, transported there from a conventional clinic setting. In the process, the psychologist has seen her take up of appointments rise from 70% to 93%, which was described as 'phenomenal'. Dealing with problems as diverse as out of control behaviour or eating difficulties, the accessibility of the service, the ease of keeping appointments, and the lack of stigma which a consultation carries have meant that the child psychologist has become an accepted and normal part of Campus life.

However, some of the other specialist services have been slower to find their niche on the Campus. The social worker has been one such case, where the early efforts have met so far with a poor response from both users and staff. It may be that it will take longer to overcome the stigma which is commonly borne by social workers if the service is to become more acceptable in the Campus setting. Equally, attempts have been made to bring in other specialist health services to the Campus in order to achieve more comprehensive provision, but with varying degrees of success, despite initial enthusiasm.

The Campus aims to promote equality of opportunity and access, celebrating the diversity of cultures within the local community. But when it comes to 'one-stop

shopping' a problem arises if there is a potential shortfall in the availability of places. As one of our interviewees pointed out, 'the wide range and high quality of services on offer could raise expectations among the local community in the belief that they might have automatic access. When demand exceeds supply, inevitably there will be disappointments'. With the large nursery in particular, there is currently a waiting list of over three hundred families. At the open mornings, the staff have had to become skilled in making prospective parents feel good about the nursery whilst telling them that they won't get a place, even though they might have been referred via the Parents' Centre next door. Similarly, the Parents' Centre has had to revise its admissions policies and procedures in the face of excessive demand, in an effort to ensure that its services reach the most needy families.

'One-Stop Shopping' in Practice - Richard and Maria

We have indicated the degree to which multiple use of services and activities was taking place in the Campus 'one-stop shop', and referred to some of the benefits and risks associated with it. Our in-depth interviews took us behind the numbers and gave us insights into how 'one-stop shopping' was working in practice for family users in some complex and demanding life situations. The case study of Richard and his family provides a vivid illustration.

Richard and his wife, Maria, have two children, Simon who is seven, and Helen who is three. Richard was over 50 when they had their first child, and is now retired. Maria is Spanish and is considerably younger. She does not work. They live in a 2 bedroom fourth floor flat. They have no immediate family living nearby. Simon suffers from a form of autism called Asperger's Syndrome as well as Attention Deficit

Disorder, or ADD. He was described as 'quite a difficult child' by his father, 'his behavour is a bit wild at times.'

The first contact the family had with the Campus was when Simon attended the original local authority nursery on the site. At that time the family was not aware that Simon had specific problems, they simply thought he was mischievous. From the nursery, Richard and Maria were introduced to the newly created Parents' Centre, where they used the drop-in for parents with children. They found it to be 'a friendly place where you could meet and talk and do crafts and learn about different cultures.' Richard also attended some of the special groups for fathers.

Simon's problems were picked up at nursery so that by the time he moved on to primary school the family was receiving help from both health and education authorities. Although he was attending a mainstream school, as a child with special needs, Richard and Maria were able to secure one of the dedicated places for Simon in the After-School and Holiday Club held at the Parents' Centre. At the same time, Helen had been given a place in the large Coram Campus nursery. She is not a communicative child, and the nursery is giving her special help with her speech. Meanwhile, Maria has continued her association with the Parents' Centre, taking classes in computing and a community interpreter's course. The family has also linked up with the special needs family project on the Campus, and is getting support from other parents of children with disabilities.

This family had received over time a huge amount of support from a variety of Campus services, which they readily acknowledged and valued. They were

particularly grateful for the help given them in coping with Simon's challenging behaviour. They felt very isolated without close family, nor could they rely on the support of friends, many of whom had dropped away because of Simon's difficulties. Richard found it especially reassuring that on the Campus his son was accepted – 'we don't feel that as parents we are regarded as the cause of Simon's behaviour. They make us feel that they want to help.' He could not imagine how they would have managed without the Campus.

We gathered many other examples in our case studies of families who were accessing services and activities through the Campus 'one-stop shop', families whose lives had been enhanced by the opportunities offered, although few were using the range of services to quite the extent as Richard and Maria. Our case studies underscored the diversity of families and the very wide ranging needs which they brought, from a Kosovan family arriving in the homeless families centre, via a bed and breakfast hotel, speaking no English, having lost everything and starting life afresh in a new country, to the art gallery director who as a single mother was trying to juggle a full time job with three young children, to the Nigerian cleaner who was working nights while studying information technology at college in the daytime, his interest triggered by the computing course undertaken at the Parents' Centre while his child attended the small nursery on the Campus.

Many users spoke very positively and warmly of the real difference the Campus services had made, both for themselves and their children. One nursery father, referring to his surprise on discovering the services available on the Campus, likened his experience there to winning the lottery - 'everyone expects to win the lottery, I

pay £1 but I am chuffed when I win £10. And this is what is happening here. I paid my £1 to come in, and I've got three numbers instead of one.'

Conclusion

Returning to the Conference theme of complexity, diversity and multiple perspectives in early childhood, the 'one-stop shop' approach at the Coram Community Campus is clearly responding to the complexity and diversity of family life in Britain today. In particular, raising a family in the inner city brings untold stresses and strains. Our research has given us insights into what it is like being a parent in Kings Cross, and has shown how the Campus services are helping and supporting families in a variety of ways, addressing multiple and diverse needs. As an example of 'one-stop shopping' the Coram Community Campus is evolving, learning its way. It is still relatively early days to evaluate the longer term impacts for users, for practitioners and for the community in which it is located. Time will tell whether this particular 'one-stop shop' proves to be an effective model for replication more widely.

(4,854 words)

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